

Interview with the Shapeshifter

Chapter Two

The Weird Tale of the Adventure of the Journey into the Terror of the Mystery of the Hidden Place of the Beyond

I woke up.

I was in a room I had never seen before.

Someone had placed me in an armchair.

The room was cosy and warm with no sense of threat. Somehow that still managed to seem grim and foreboding. I felt strange, as though there was something I needed to remember.

Michael Kristen entered the room and sat in the other armchair. He looked at me intently and smiled.

I noticed that he had his clothes on. I half remembered that he had taken them off.
..... Something about a fish tank.

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that a single fish in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a.....what? Where did that strange thought come from? When in Delphi do as the Delphiniums do. I think I must have read that somewhere. The thing in the corner.

I looked frantically around to see if there was a thing in the corner. I realised that the room had no corners. It was round and round and all around the corner of where all the corners had gone. Alexis Korner. A Lexus Plexus Nexus Sexus Saxon saxophone sacks are what rich people have the coal delivered in in in.

Dizzy dizzy queasy queasy crazy crazy quasi quasi zi zi zi zi zi.

Forbidden room The Lost Horizon the hidden orchard of cherry blossoms. Nick knack paddy whacks give a dog a bone phone home.

Welcome to the California Hotel you can never leaves in autumn Mr. Tumnus lest you grow old and wear the bottoms of your trousers rolled.

"I think you've had a bit of a turn" said Michael Kristen, "There's a lot of it about".

"You changed into something" I mumbled.

"Oh, thank you for noticing!" Kristen grinned mischievously, "Just a little fashion number." He spread his arms to show off the suit he was wearing. He placed his thumbs behind the lapels and wiggled his fingers. He opened the jacket to show me the lining. He reached down to the

trouser leg and grasped the crease between his thumb and forefinger. He gave the sharply creased fabric a little tug. "Good Schmutter! Nice whistle! Do you like it?"

"I mean umm ... not the suit ... You changed your body".

"Yes. I did. I'm world famous as the man with a thousand faces. I even did an album called "Shapeshifter". Everybody knows I'm the changing person, the metamorph, the skin walker".

"But you really can".

"Yep". He put his head at an angle and waited for me to get used to the idea.

"How is that possible?" My eyes were probably bulging with shock. My head ached.

Michael's face rippled the way it had when he was in the water tank and then I was looking at my own face looking back at me.

I got scared. I stood up saying "No! No, no, no! You can't be me!" I weakened and fell back into the chair.

Michael's face rippled again and his own features returned to their usual configuration.

"Sorry," He said.

"Norman, I'm sorry I've scared you but I need you to realise that I can be anyone. Anyone at all".

"So why the fish tank? If you can just do a change like that whenever you feel like it?"

"I sometimes need to refresh the power" he said, "The change power is in the water and certain kinds of light".

I looked down, shaking my poor aching head and trying to understand. "So why do you need me to know this? Why have you been taking an interest in me of all people?" My voice was sounding a little strained.

Michael nodded. "Yes. You need explanations and I will supply them".

He stood up and began to slowly pace the room, which, I noticed, was now slightly less round than before.

"Tell me Norman, do you remember that story you wrote about the pocket universe?"

I half-shrugged. "Yes. I remember that whole series of stories. You've read them?"

"Yes. I've read lots of your stories Norman. I was a subscriber to that little magazine you used to publish *"INTO-the-OUT"*.

I made an exaggerated surprise face. "You were one of the 35 people who subscribed? Huh. You must've used a pseudonym".

"Of course. To a shapeshifter who is hiding in plain sight changing the name is the easy part".

"Of course, of course" I conceded.

"There is more to me than meets the eye" said Kristen, "You've seen me naked but you've only seen some of my parts! I have many others!" Then he laughed like Dracula if played by Christopher Lee. I was, for the moment, incapable of replying to all of this weirdness.

"Tell me, Norman, where do you get the ideas for your stories?"

After a pause I managed to say "From dreams mostly".

"Good! That's right. Okay Norman, let me tell you about water and railways and the dreamtime and the Matter of Britain and an ogre or two".

He then launched into a long long monologue while I listened in utter astonishment.

"Dreams are not what you think. Dreams move like rivers on a journey to the sea or sometimes they move away from the sea. Dreams follow gravity but sometimes they defy gravity. Dreams follow roads and railway lines or the dreams can stay magnetised to a location, orbiting around a castle, a bombsite, a forest or even around your body".

He poured some mango juice from a decanter into two glasses. Put one glass on the table next to my chair. He sat at an angle on the arm of the armchair and sipped at the other glass.

"When people think they see auras or a ghost or a flying saucer they don't see what they think they're seeing. People see the dream which surrounds something important, or follows an important trackway".

Still in a blurry state of shock about everything that I'd seen I picked up the glass from the table and sipped at the mango juice. I was aware of a feeling about the things Kristen was telling me. I felt that the story he was telling sounded a bit like ley line theory joined into Freudian psychology and mixed up with some sort of psychic energy idea. I would have been interested in all those subjects when I was younger but had become more cynical as the years went by. Now I was prepared to take his story seriously only because of what I had seen him do. I knew that, unbelievable as it seemed, all of this was real.

Kristen continued, "I've done things, seen things, been places which you couldn't imagine. Yet. An enormous dragonfly in the Earth's magnetic field. A dragonfly or a creature which is part dragon and part fly or part something else. Gog and Magog, the Ogres of L'Ogres, a ghost railway from here at the village of Faygate and ghost railway lines going in all directions but when you try to map them they go away or change direction or sometimes you can't map them and sometimes you can".

If it wasn't for Michael's showmanship and rock star voice I would think he was babbling like some crazed homeless delirium case in a bus station. I was struggling to take in all the

things he said and I'm probably doing a terrible job of reporting his words in this piece of writing. It was all just such a rush of crazy new information.

Kristen noticed how I looked.

"You're overloaded with this. I understand that" He said, "but bear with me for the moment".

He started to speak again but was interrupted by the phone ringing. It was a very old fashioned phone. Possibly a 1920s vintage.

Kristen picked up the phone, rippling as he did so and assuming a new form. Apart from his business suit he now looked like a 1960s trendy fashion girl with pouty lips and Jean Shrimpton stylish hair. He/She spoke into the phone, "Hello? Polly Dolly speaking, what is the situation?"

There was a pause, a furrowed brow, a gasp of exasperation. "Is Edna available? No? Okay then, I'll do what I can. Thank you for the information". Michael or "Polly Dolly" spoke in a perfect female young stylish voice, like a renegade from a Finishing School.

As Michael put the phone down he rippled back into his more familiar male form and turned to speak to me. "We have to go! I'm sorry for the inconvenience but we're needed in another place and in time if we hurry".

He ushered me through the door to an adjoining room which I hadn't previously noticed and said "I'm going to open a dream tunnel!"

He looked in a varnished oak cabinet and found a golden pen, which he flourished.

He said "This isn't the sword Isca-Libre or the axe of the Axe but it has sufficient power for what we need".

He held the pen as if he were somehow writing something on thin air and he finished up by signing with lavish curly embellishments. As he did so the room folded like a hexaflexagon and then we were in a tunnel.

"This a dream tunnel," said Michael, "Now you'll see the reality of the things I've been talking about!"

I felt scared, excited and scared, not necessarily in that order.

He led on into the tunnel.